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CHARMS AND EXORCISM IN THE WRITINGS OF HANS SACHS

Although distinctly a man of the people, thinking their thoughts and living their life, Sachs was far above the general average of intelligence by which he was surrounded. Even when Luther was expressing his belief in the supernatural powers of some persons in league with the devil¹ and the wonderful manifestations of the powers of darkness on earth, Sachs was deriding and attacking this same belief. In one of his early rhymed tales he writes:

Der Teufel lest ein Weib sich zwingen,
So ferr ers in unglaub mûg bringen.
Auch wo man schetz weisz unuerhol,
Die grebt man on den Teufel wol.
So ist der Cristallen gesicht
Lauter gespenst, Teufels gedicht.
Ir warsagen ist warheit lehr,
Das zutrifft etwan ungeuer.
Das wettermachen sie bethort,
Schlûg sonst gleich wol auch an das ort.
Des Teutels Ee und Reuterey
Ist nur gespenst und fantasey.
Das Bockfaren kompt ausz miszglauben.
Der Teufel thuts mit gespenst betauben,
Das sie leit schlaffen in eim qualm.
Meint doch, sie far umb allenthalbm
Und treib disen und jehnen handel
Und in ein Katzen sich verwandel.
Disz als ist heidnisch und ein spot
Bey den, die nicht glauben in Got.²

This moral was written in 1531 when Sachs was comparatively young and before he had developed the full breadth of his humor. He later found a subtler means of attacking these superstitions, one that lent itself well to his particular type of humor. This was by the use of conjuring and exorcism scenes designed to drive out the evil spirit that was causing trouble. Sometimes the

¹ Cf. *Luther und der deutsche Volksaberglaube*, by Erich Klinger. Palaestra 56. Berlin 1912.

² *Neudrucke deutscher Literaturwerke des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*. No. 110-117, Schwank 13, 79-98.

charm was in German verse and sometimes in maccaronic form, a combination here of German and Latin. This latter form, Sachs' own invention as applied to charms he uses but sparingly, and it does not appear at all in his earlier work. The first maccaronic conjuration appears among the Fastnacht plays in 1552 and in a Schwank first in 1556. In both the German and maccaronic forms of the charms Sachs found a good means to heighten the humorous effect, using it as he did with jocular seriousness.

Sachs makes infrequent use of his invention, employing it but five times, while he uses strictly German conjuring and exorcism scenes twice as many times. Treating first the purely German charms we find the first such scene in a story taken from Boccaccio. To save her lover who has knocked while her husband is at home the wily wife has the latter cough to show there is a man in the room and then conjures the evil spirit in the form of her lover thus:

Dw pões gespenst alwegen,
Hast an der Pfincztag nacht dein raum!
Ge hin unter dem pfirszing paum,
Da wirstw tobisumpto hinden
Und etlich chacharilli finden
Und dein münd an den strosack secz!
Far hin mit gueter nacht zw lecz!
Las mich und mein Johannes schlaffen!"³

The spirit needed no further directions to discover the provisions alluded to in terms unintelligible to all save the initiated.

Husbands were remarkably dense and incredulous as to the power of a charm. Although one of them saw his wife's lover jump from the window and noted well that he had neither horns nor beard, a goat in the garden took away all doubts in the matter when supported by the following charm:

"Las dich effen alwegen,
Dw esel, narr und dropff!
Das hiren in deinem kopff
Wert unsinig und wüetig!
Das geb dir got der gütig!"⁴

To cause amusement for his guests a practical joker gave his maid instructions as to how she might make herself invisible.

³ *Neudrucke*, Schwank 62, 48-55.

⁴ *Neudrucke*, Schw. 120, 46-50.

The process was simple. Her instructions were as follows:

“Nemb den wuerffel in den münd
Und ker dich drey mal umb und umb
Und sprich zu yedem mal Mûmb, mûmb!
Kûmb, pûecz and deck mich vorn und hinden,
Das ich thw wie der wind verschwinden!”⁵

The thieves who try to slide down a ray of moonlight from the roof of a house into the chamber below employ a very simple charm, merely repeating seven times the mystic word “sûlem.”⁶

An elaborate Schwank resembling a Fastnacht play with only one actor describes the method of conjuring by which the evil spirit throws from the pot containing the knives of all the company, those belonging to adulterers. The charm could scarcely have been taken seriously by the most credulous.

“Kom Beltzenbock, wie du denn heist,
In disen Topff, du böser Geist,
In beysein diser Biderleut,
Das ich dir hie ernstlich gebeut
Bey aller Alraun grosz andacht
Und bey der Fröesch geschrey zu nacht,
Bey aller Sperling Stadelgsang,
Wellichs den Bawern machet bang,
Und bey dem vierbleterten Kle,
Darzu auch der Zigeuner Eh,
Fünffzincket Weinraut musz da sein,
Zwen Händleshåller grosz und klein,
.
Zum ersten, andern, zum dritten mal,
Kom in den Topff und rûr dich ball!
Wûrff der Ehbrecher Messer rausz,
Dasz jederman sech in dem Hausz!”⁷

When the spirit still hesitates to comply, the conjurer forces obedience by the threat that he will “Bald kuri muri mit dir machen.”⁸

Turning to the Fastnacht plays we find six occasions on which Sachs has used German conjuring formulae. An old woman who finds difficulty in compelling the devil to give her the shoes he has promised her for services rendered speaks the following brief charm with the desired result:

⁵ *Neudrucke*, No. 126-134. Schwank 256, 78-82.

⁶ Schwank 331, 77-78.

⁷ Schwank 364, 47-58; 65-68.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

“Ich gebeüt dir, du böser Gaist,
 Bey deinem Namen, wie du haist,
 Wölst kommen beym Höllischen flüch,
 Mir bringen mein verdiente Schûch,
 Zum ersten, andren, dritten mall
 Komm und mich meiner schuld bezal!”⁹

In a later Fastnacht play an ironical rollicking charm is spoken in all seriousness by a priest to exorcise the evil spirit from a peasant who is trying to hatch calves from cheese. The priest draws out his book and reads:

“Ich beschwer dich auff diesen tag,
 Du Teuffl, bey aller betlers blag,
 Bey aller Pfaffen reinigkeyt,
 Bey Schwiger and Schnur einigkeyt
 Und bey aller Ehbrecher trew,
 Bey aller schwartzen Magdt nach rew,
 bey aller Mûnich Geistligkeyt,
 Und bey aller Lantzknecht frûmkeyt,
 Und bey aller Spiler unfal,
 Und bey aller Juden jrsal,
 Bey aller schönen Frawen huldt,
 Bey aller beginnen geduldt,
 Bey aller Kauffleut warhafft schwern!
 Du wolst von diesem Man ankern
 In ein wildt rhôrich in Behmr walt,
 Und fahr baldt ausz durch diesen spalt!”¹⁰

Even this powerful charm is ineffective until physical force is also applied and the peasant is dragged off his basket of cheese.

Again a quick-witted wandering scholar saw a chance to procure a meal for himself by playing on the credulity of a peasant and conjuring in the form of the devil the village priest who has been disturbed in his secret love affair. Making a circle with his sword he recites:

“Nun rûff ich dir zum ersten mal:
 Komb her ausz dem Hellischen Saal!
 Bring mir in kreis ein kandl mit wein,
 Wûrst und newbachen Semmelein!
 Zum ander mal so rûff ich dir,
 Das du kompst in den Kreis zu mir.
 Zum dritten mal beschwer ich dich,
 Du wolst mit lenger saumen mich,
 Und komb in den kreis zu mir her

⁹ *Neudrucke*, No. 31-32, *Fastnachtsp.*, 18, 196-201.

¹⁰ *Neudrucke*, 39-40, *Fns.*, 34, 217-232.

Und bring mir, was ich hab beger!

 Teuffel, nun hab wir dein genung.
 Thu nur bald ausz dem kreis ein sprung
 Und schmitz denn hinden ausz dem hausz
 Oder far zu dem First hinaus
 Oder im Kûhstal durchs Kûhloch,
 Das jederman on schaden doch!"¹¹

On one occasion Sachs causes the prince of practical jokers. Eulenspiegel, to employ a charm in his work of deception. Promising the old women of a village that he would make their furs as good as new he boils these in milk after speaking the following charm:

"Ich peschwer euch, ir pelcz uralt,
 Das ir verwandelt euer gestalt!
 Darnach ob haises fewers glûet!
 Und euch alle verjûngen thûet!
 Und last von euch die alten har,
 Verjûngt euer haût gancz und gar,"¹²

One more German charm is used in a Fastnacht play written toward the end of his period of greatest production and shows that Sachs' feeling for the absurdly humorous did not relax in later life. This is a charm spoken by a doctor in collusion with the devil to drive the latter out of a rich Jew:

"Gaist, ich peschwer dich pey pix pax,
 Pey flederwisch, hering und lax,
 Und das dw arger Belzepock
 Ausfaresst uber stain und stock
 In das wild gerôrich hinaûs
 Und raûm mir eillent dieses haûs!"¹³

No less effective than these ridiculous charms were the German-Latin combinations. All were able to grasp the meaning, and the Latin endings on familiar German words simply added piquancy to the whole. Only one is this form of charm employed in a Schwank. A wandering scholar finds a credulous peasant and proceeds to teach him how to conjure up evil spirits. He must take two companions and after various mysterious rites speak the follow-charm, after which the spirits would appear:

"Venite, ir unhuldibûs,
 Pringt pruegel her uns stultibûs!

¹¹ *Neudrucke*, *Fns.*, 37, 243-252; 255-260.

¹² *Neudrucke*, Nos. 60-61, *Fns.*, 72, 251-256.

¹³ *Neudrucke*, Nos. 63-64, *Fns.*, 76, 300-305.

Die semper mit uns spentibûs
Sûeb capite et lentibûs!"¹⁴

Needless to say the spirits appear at once in the form of the wandering scholar and like rascals and proceed to obey the instructions in the charm.

This maccaronic variety of charm is found four times in the Fastnacht plays and all within a very limited period of time, between 1552 and 1556. The instance already quoted from the Schwank is from the year 1555. The earliest instance among the Fastnacht plays depicts a priest using this form for purposes of mystification. A miserly peasant has had a side of pork stolen from him and the thieves proceed to make him think he has stolen it himself. The priest comes to their aid with this charm:

"In Narribus phantastibus
Nequamque et in diebibus
Hanges in galgare Fane
Rabiquenagare pame!"¹⁵

This style of charm was equally effective in domestic quarrels. A husband who spends all his substance with companions in the tavern employs the following with good success in making his exasperated wife speak:

"Male Bestia in spelunckes
Thabes kûmaulque et munckes
Pengel que sub schulter et lentes
Facit dein rûesel hie loquentes!"¹⁶

On the only occasion on which an old woman appears in the light of a benefactor she tells the young wife of a "wunderlich man," how to call the goddess Alraun. This is done by the charm that follows:

"Truez, aigensinn und clauibus
Wider pellen und muffibus,
Venit prægel et fawstibus,
Sueb capite et lentibus!"¹⁷

After gathering up the coins thrown to the goddess the old woman dispenses some very sensible advice to the young wife about the best means of restoring harmony in the household.

Most characteristic of Sachs in its deliciously humorous wording is the exorcism of the evil spirit of suspicion in the husband by

¹⁴ *Neudrucke*, Schwank 164, 55-58.

¹⁵ *Fns.*, 41, 221-224.

¹⁶ *Fns.*, 64, 309-312.

¹⁷ *Fns.*, 63, 225-228.

his wife and mother-in-law. They throw him down on a bench and the old woman speaks this charm over him:

"In doribûs et lappibûs
In dôlpis et dildappibûs
Dich effen mulieribûs!
Dw semper pleibst ein asinûs.
Sûrge et stampf hin fûes fûr fûs,
Dobsûcht nûnquâm dich lasen mûs."¹⁸

Here as elsewhere the charm was effective. In fact it was part of Sachs' humorous stock in trade that such buffoonery should always make a tremendous impression on the simple victim.

A glance at Sachs' sources for the Schwänke and Fastnacht plays mentioned above to determine how much he was influenced by them in this type of humor will be of interest. The five cases in which Sachs uses a maccaronic charm are his own contribution to the story, as the source gives the words of no charm or conjuration. In one case¹⁹ the source has not been discovered. In the other four cases²⁰ the source of two is Pauli and of the other two, *Steinhöwel*.²¹

An examination of the sources of the stories in which German charms appear gives very similar results. Of the ten instances in which well-developed or rudimentary charms are found the source has not been discovered in four cases.²² In two other cases²³ the source shows no charm, indicating that the latter is Sachs' own contribution. In two of the remaining four places the charm in Sachs and in the source is merely rudimentary as in the first charm quoted above (Schw. 62). Here the source has simply "O fantasma . . . ge in den garten under den pösen pfersig paume . . . ". Similarly in another Schwank the charm²⁴ con-

¹⁸ *Fns.* 74, 379-384.

¹⁹ Schwank 164.

²⁰ *Fns.*, 63, source, *Schimpf und Ernst*, no. 135 (Stutt. Lit. Ver. Vol. 85); *Fns.*, 64, source, *Schimpf und Ernst* no. 124.

²¹ *Fns.*, 41, source, Boccaccio, *Decam.*, 8.6 (Stutt. Lit. Ver. Vol. 51); *Fns.*, 74, source, *Aesop* (Stutt. Lit. Ver. Vol. 117) p. 336.

²² Schw. 256 and 364; *Fns.*, 34 and 76. In the last case the source is probably oral from old tales found in Romance literature.

²³ *Fns.*, 18, source, Keller, *Fastnachtspiele aus dem 15. Jahrhundert*, no. 57, Stutt. Lit. Ver. Vol. 29; cf. Kirchhoff, *Wendunmuth I*, no. 366, Stutt. Lit. Ver. Vol. 95; *Fns.*, 72, source, *Eulenspiegel*, no. 30; *Neudrucke*, nos. 55-56.

²⁴ Schw. 331, source, *Beispiele der alten Weisen* (Stutt. Lit. Ver. Vol. 56) Chap. 1, p. 12; cf. Pauli, *Schimpf und Ernst*, no. 628.

sists in repeating seven times the word "sûlem". Of the remaining two cases of German charms Sachs has in one²⁵ transformed a simple statement into a well-defined charm. Rosenblut simply writes:

"Und er do von dem pawrn begert
Das er im einhin trug ein schwert
Da er die stuben umbreis
Und macht damit ein kerisz
Und stellet sich und den pawrn darein
Und redet lang in der lapartein."²⁶

Sachs' more vivid imagination has supplied the words of the clever scholar. It is significant to note that in this case the analogues²⁷ also show a rudimentary charm though not apparently related to that used by Sachs.

In one source only does Sachs seem to have found a charm²⁸ which he could follow somewhat closely although he condenses it into half the number of lines. With the lines quoted from Sachs above (p. 3) compare the following from Hugo von Trimberg:

"Ia dich effen, narrengûl!
Wölte got wêr dîn houbet fûl,
So gewünne ich wil armez wîp
Nach dînem tod nôche froen lîp!
Du bist sinne und witze ein slûr,
Worte und werke ein vilzgebûr:
Disen seggen setze ich dir ze buoze;
Und daz du sterbest vor mînem fuoze
Oder daz dîn hirne vûrbaz wüete,
Des gewer mich got durch sîne güete!"²⁹

The conclusion to be drawn from Sachs' use of the charm, after comparison with his source, is that in maccaronic form it was his own invention, while as purely German formulae he greatly enlarged the scope of his predecessors in this field.

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²⁵ *Fns.*, 37, source, Rosenblut, Keller, *Fastnachtsp.*, no. 3, p. 1172, Stutt. Lit. Ver. Vol. 28.

²⁶ P. 1174.

²⁷ Montanus, *Gartengesellschaft*, no. 101, Stutt. Lit. Ver. Vol. 217, p. 398f; Waldis, *Aesopus*, IV, 42; *Deutsch. Dichter des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Vol. 17, pt. 2, p. 234 lines 139-146.

²⁸ Schw. 120, source, *Hugo von Trimberg*, Stutt. Lit. Ver. Vol. 248, lines 12231-12240.

²⁹ Lines 12231-12240.